1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

Tin City

EASTWARD FROM SAVANNAH IN WEED-GROWN FIELDS lies Tin City, born of the depression and nurtured by the lean years that have followed. The little settlement, with its uncertain lanes winding through a maze of grass and tall shrubbery, stretches out over two hundred acres of land where long ago slaves labored in the black muck of rice fields.

To the west and south this land is touched by the ragged fringe of Savannah; to the north it sweeps away to the murky waters of the Savannah River. In 1819 the city of Savannah condemned the wet-culture rice lands and attempted to build up the unhealthy, low-lying acres with leaves and trash. With the passing years the place has been marked with peculiar ridges and mounds, the result of this building-up process. A wild growth of tall greenery covers the land.

About 1929 Louis Ellis, an old Negro who had been evicted from his home for non-payment of rent, secured permission from Savannah to settle on the land. His shack of discarded tin and his patch of a garden soon attracted other poverty stricken Negroes, and around him grew up a small community, self sufficient in its rent-free houses and its produce of garden and river. Although some of the settlers have abandoned the community and only about twenty remain, Tin City still leads its own independent existence. Within its precincts the fresh atmosphere of a country district prevails, for here and there a clump of chinaberry trees or an oak tree spreads shade, rows of sugar cane and

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

Frogtown and Currytown

WITHIN THE WESTERN LIMITS OF SAVANNAH ARE Frogtown and Currytown, through which flows Musgrove Creek, narrow and sluggish, on its way from "Big Ogeechee" to the red Savannah River. These are two poor communities, as can be seen from the paintless little houses on dirt streets that often lack sidewalks. With the canal cutting the center of the district, there is scant space for gardens; but in spite of this, there are small patches of earth green with collards and turnips, and almost every "stoop" is decorated with a row of plants in tins of assorted dimensions.

During week days, with many persons away at work in other sections of the city, it is mostly the old who are found at home. Grandmothers and grandfathers "mind" the small children while the mothers work out.

One old woman, Anna Miller,* had lived most of her youth on a Butler Island plantation, where some of the older workers had occupied the same cabins given to them before emancipation.

"Sebral uh dem hans wuz bery ole people," said Anna Miller. "Dey speak a funny language an none uh duh res ub us couldn hahdly unuhstan a wud dey say. Dey hab special name fuh all kine uh ting, but duh only ting I kin membuh is dat dey call a watuh bucket a 'juba haltuh'."

We found here, too, that in certain households certain foods are considered to bring bad luck.

"I dohn eat peanuts," Millie McKen ** told us, "an I dohn let a soul in muh fambly eat em."

* *Anna Miller, 1018 Cuyler Street, Currytown.*
** *Millie McKen, 409 West Duffy Street, Currytown.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

Grimball's Point

GRIMBALL'S POINT, LYING AT THE NORTHWESTERN end of the Isle of Hope on the marshes and creeks that run from the wide Skidaway River, is one of the characteristic spots of Savannah's rural landscape. The lowland spreads grassy flats against the horizon; the squawks of marsh hen rise from the long reeds on Grimball's Creek; all the year round a familiar sight is the Negro fisherman sitting patiently in his small bateau or trudging with his plump catch up an old oak-shaded shell road.

A few white residents maintain comfortable summer homes at Grimball's Point, but the settlers scattered on the southern part of the point are Negroes, former slaves and descendants of slaves who once worked the great plantations on the Isle of Hope and other near-by islands. Some of the inhabitants are employed on Grimball's Point hunting preserve, while others are farmers or fishermen. Their abodes are frame bungalows with front porches or little shacks of one or two rooms, but most of the dwellings are surrounded by sun-dappled yards, fenced with boards or chicken wire. Each has its backyard pump as there is no running water.

Of the ten Negro families on the point, young and old believe in signs and auguries. "Catfish Tom" William, Habersham Gibson, and Solomon Gibson professed to know that "some signs sho do wuk." Thomas Tuten, who has spent his fifty-eight years on the island, warned us that "yuh sho has tuh watch people cuz dey kin do yuh." Aging Aunt Cinda Smith, employed on the old Wiley place, is given the respect

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

ting on the front porch of Liza Basden's * small, compactly constructed brown house, we listened to her comments about the prevailing beliefs and customs. The scene before us was restful. The garden planted at the sides and front of the house was enclosed by a low wire fence. Within this enclosure a number of dogs and chickens scuttled about. At a short distance from the house stood an iron pump and an immense rusted iron pot, probably used in the past for boiling clothes. On all sides as far as the eye could see were vast stretches of green land, shaded by massive-trunked, moss-draped trees and covered with an abundance of semi-tropical foliage and underbrush. Here and there could be glimpsed the slanting roofs of neighboring houses.

When we first arrived Liza, a pretty golden-skinned, rather heavy-set woman about eighty years of age, and a small black grandchild were the only occupants of the porch. She told us she had recently come home from a visit to children in the North. Presently her husband and a daughter approached without speaking and sat down unobtrusively in a corner. For the most part they listened to the conversation, contributing only an occasional remark.

"I wuz bawn with a caul," Liza told us, pausing in her task of peeling and eating figs from the pan that she held in her lap. "That means I see ghos.[4] Least I could see em till aftuh I stop havin chillun. Then I stop seein em.

"Three of my chillun they bawn with cauls too. They wuz always skedduh than othuhs. They wuz always fraid of the dahk an nevuh lak tuh go off by themselfs. I nevuh know jis wut they see."

"What did the ghost that you saw look like?" we inquired.

A reflective expression crossed Liza's round pleasant face and she nodded her gray head with its neatly pinned braids.

"They peah jis as nachral as anybody. Most of em ain got no heads. Jis go right along down the path.[5] One time

* *Liza Basden, Harris Neck.*

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

Foreword

The Sea Islands are low and flat, and they have a beauty beyond description. When I was a child growing up in the South Carolina lowcountry, we used to take Sunday afternoon drives. If we went down from Charleston across the Ashley River and Wappoo Creek onto James Island and then across the Stono River onto Johns Island, we saw great live oaks leaning dreamily over the road. I remember (or perhaps I imagine) that their low branches, almost hidden by gloomy, gray moss, seemed to enclose the road into long miles of gray tunnel. Here and there we passed through swampy lowlands. I was told that in such places snakes and alligators (and haunts and plat-eyes) were lying in wait for bad little boys and girls. The tangled vines and underbrush had a menacing and sinister beauty. Here and there, too, the oak-lined avenue was broken by fields and pastures. Mules and cows dozed and switched flies under a torrid sun. Rainfall seemed an ancient memory: there were spots where the grass sometimes seemed to have abandoned the effort to be green. And here and there families of black people waved from the porches of small, gray, weather-stained cabins. Shouting children and barking dogs chased one another across neatly swept yards. I can still recall the fresh clouds of fragrance wafted in from the nearby salt marsh and the soft sound of pine needles rustling in the breeze.

Atlantic waves break upon a series of barrier islands all along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina. Tidal streams and inlets, draining an intricate system of shallow, marsh-filled coastal lagoons, separate them from the mainland and from one another. From Waties Island in the mouth of Little River near the North and South Carolina line south past the wide beaches and thick dunes of the Grand Strand; past Pawleys and North islands to Georgetown; from South, Cedar, and Murphy islands to Cape Romaine; down past Bull, Capers, and Dewees islands and the Isle of Palms to Charleston; from James and Johns, past Kiawah, Wad-

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

malaw, and Edisto islands to Beaufort; down past St. Helena, Hunting, Fripp, and Parris islands; past Hilton Head and Daufuski to Savannah; from Tybee, Wassaw, Ossabaw, and St. Catherines to Sapelo; past St. Simons and Jekyll islands to Cumberland on the Georgia-Florida border—the Sea Islands guard the coast. The coastline is intersected not only by Winyah and Bull bays, Charleston Harbor, and St. Helena, Port Royal, Sapelo, and St. Andrew sounds, but also by many lesser inlets curling around the Sea Islands. Bounded on one side by the ocean and on the other by the salt marsh, these Sea Islands use the energy of wind and wave to build sand barriers that protect the mainland from storm and surf.

The Sea Islands north of Charleston are often older beach resorts such as Pawleys Island and the Isle of Palms. Their residents and visitors are mainly white. Other islands are wildlife sanctuaries such as the 31,000-acre Cape Romaine National Wildlife Refuge, the 20,000-acre Tom Yawkee Wildlife Center on South Island, and the 17,000-acre Belle W. Baruch research facilities on Hobcaw Barony. They serve as home for such endangered species as the bald eagle, the Eastern brown pelican, the short-nosed sturgeon, and the loggerhead turtle.

Many islands south of Charleston are populated entirely or primarily by blacks, whose venerable folk culture and vivid creole language are the subject of this book. On the coastal mainland adjacent to the Sea Islands are black people who share that folk culture and that creole language. While they are not—strictly speaking—Sea Islanders, in many ways this book tells their story too.

For two centuries this coastal region has been the home of enslaved Africans and their descendants. Theirs is a sad but inspiring story. They built—in a very literal sense—the plantations, and they tilled the rich fields of rice, indigo, or Sea Island cotton. Some of the slaves were brought to the Sea Islands by Barbadian planters who migrated to the Carolina colony in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a refuge from the overcrowding of Barbados. Many more were imported directly from Africa. By the American Revolution the slaves, from various parts of Africa and from various ethnic and linguistic groups, had already created a distinctive culture. During the Civil War, when white planter families fled the Sea Islands before the invading Union troops, Sea Island blacks began to cultivate the land for themselves. Hundreds of them joined the Union Army in the celebrated First South Carolina Volunteers. On January 16, 1865, General William Tecumseh

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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[p. xxviii]

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

Introduction

539 [i bɪnə dɹiŋk di βɔrə
ɛn i gɔt ɹait ɸə ste iə]

She has partaken of the water,
and she has the right to live here.

101 The life-styles, tales, and language peculiarities captured in this book were unearthed during more than nine years of research with the Gullah- or Geechee-speaking Sea Islanders of Georgia and South Carolina and three months of field work in Nigeria, West Africa. Like
121 most Americans, I was in total ignorance of the existence of the Sea Islands for many years—in my case, until 1972. Once I heard about them, no amount of library research and no amount of reading about the Sea Islanders could quench my desire actually to see for myself how they had managed to retain so many more remnants of their West African ancestry than African-Americans in other parts of the country.

•133 On my first trip to the Sea Islands, in 1973, I remember crossing a
491 bridge leading from Charleston to James Island, crossing another one from James Island to Johns Island, and then another one from Johns Island to Wadmalaw. On Wadmalaw the scenery changed drastically, and the farther I drove along the narrow, winding road into the depths of this remote island, the more unusual my surroundings became: hanging moss; dense woodlands; flat, "boggy" swamps; and the musty, sweet aroma of ocean air. A person could get lost forever on these islands, I remember thinking. As I would later learn, it was this very remoteness which contributed to the continuation of the African-derived culture of the Sea Island area.

123 I turned around a deep bend in the road and continued on, ultimately

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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The Social History and Organization

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Me old building e de leak,
and me soul e got fe move:

There is a leak in this old building (body),
and my soul has got to move:

Topography

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The Sea Islands, commonly known as the Gullah- or Geechee-speaking communities, extend along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia to the tip of Florida. Isolated by expansive marshlands, turbulent streams, and massive rivers, some islands are several miles from the coast of the United States. Estimates indicate that there are as many as a thousand islands along the coastline, though many of them are small and unfit for human habitation.[1] The habitable ones vary in size. St. Helena, for example, covers only 15 square miles, while Wadmalaw extends for 43. Sandy Island, still not connected by bridge to the mainland, is estimated to be 50 square miles; Edisto is about 72; and Johns Island, the second largest island in U.S. waters, is approximately 100.[2]

131

The Sea Islands of South Carolina, on which most of this study is based, extend on the north from Sandy Island near Georgetown to Port Royal, St. Helena, and Daufuski on the south. Sandy Island is traditionally included among the Sea Islands of South Carolina because it is culturally similar to the coastal islands; it is, however, a freshwater

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

river island rather than a saltwater ocean island.[3] The islands just off the coast of Charleston include James, Johns, Wadmalaw, Edisto, and Yonges, among many others. The Sea Islands of Georgia extend on the northern coast from Harris Neck; on the southern coast they include Sapelo, Darien, St. Simons, and St. Marys.

The Sea Islands and surrounding areas were a mere submerged portion of the continental shelf during the early geologic history of North America. As time passed, the ocean retreated to its present position, and the low flatlands left behind became known as the Georgia and Carolina low country.[4]

The Sea Islands are tranquil, flat, swampy lands with elevations ranging from near sea level to slightly over 100 feet. The climate is generally mild throughout the year, with very few recordings of drastically low temperatures. The coastal areas are characterized by slightly higher annual temperatures than other areas, primarily because of their proximity to the ocean.[5] The climatogram shown in Figure 1 illustrates the changes at various times of the year.

The Sea Island area is characterized by deep rivers snaking along the coast and dividing the land into countless large and small islands. The sandy soil, which drains inadequately, places economic and developmental constraints on the area. Road building is extremely difficult in spots; some islands still have no paved roads. The 1979 regional housing market analysis for the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester (BCD) Council of Governments estimated that 90 percent of the land area within Charleston County, which includes many of the Carolina Sea Islands, is composed of soils that put moderate to severe limitations on land use for urban development. The soil has poor load-bearing capacities, in addition to the prevailing poor drainage. Thus, financing for development must include provisions for land improvement as well as adequate drainage systems. Of the 2,614 square miles of land within the BCD region, only 5 percent has been developed for urban use; remaining portions of the coastal region are primarily rural.[6] Slightly more than half of the area is forest and woodlands. The marsh and swamplands, nearly a quarter of the total, grow little but marsh weeds, owing to the ebb and flow of daily tidal waters. These lands are flat and dangerous; there are reports of unfortunate islanders' being caught in "suckholes" or "mashmud" and never returning. The overall pattern of land use is summarized in Table 1.

Few bridges, with the exception of wooden crossings, connected

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina .

Table 1. Land Use for BCD Region

Category	*Acres*	*% of Total*
Developed areas		
Urban uses	75,000	4.29
Residential	21,000	1.20
Commercial	3,500	0.20
Industrial	12,600	0.72
Public and other	37,900	2.17
Agricultural uses		
Cropland and pasture	178,800	10.23
Forest and woodlands (excluding swampland forests)	861,740	49.30
Undeveloped areas		
Marsh and swampland	416,600	23.83
Inland waterways	140,800	8.06
Total	1,747,940	100.00

Source: BCD Council of Governments, *Regional Housing Market Analysis*, 1975, p. 5; figuring corrected.

the islands to the mainland before 1940. Though considerable sums of money have been expended within recent years on the construction of long, narrow bridges to span the Atlantic coast, ocean recesses, rivers, and streams, the more remote islands, such as Sandy and Daufuski, continue to be inaccessible except by boat.[7] Most of the Sea Islands remain very sparsely settled despite the population growth brought on by recent industrialization and commercialization. The landscape is pastoral and mysterious compared to inland areas of the United States. Most islands are characterized by graceful palmetto trees, expansive green terrain, and atmospheric haze. The landscape in fact bears a striking resemblance to the topography of such coastal countries as Nigeria, Ghana, Angola, and Liberia, the tropical homelands of the Sea Islanders' ancestors.[8]

Electricity came to the more remote islands only as recently as the 1960s. Streetlights rarely line the narrow roadways of even the more developed islands, and in late evening the overhanging trees give the roads a ghostly allure. After nightfall it is literally impossible to see even two feet ahead.[9]

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

159 then he is thrown into the bucket. In a good season one gets more crabs
123 than one can eat in a couple of hours. If the season is bad, one can stay
out in the creek all day in the sultry island sun and still have only a few
226 "po, skase [scarce]" little crabs. During the bad seasons it was usually
I and not Miss Myma who finally had to come in. She could walk miles
in those creek beds. One day, when we had come upon a pool of water
deeper than the regular creek bed, and thus not emptied by the tide, she
decided she would teach me to throw a net. She stooped, pulled out her
net, stationed part of the midpoint in her teeth, stretched a portion
along her arm, circled the net a bit for balance, let go of the string, and
twirled the net up over the small but deep hole of water. The net cir-
cled, fanned out, and landed on the pool. "Good throw, Miss Myma,"
I cried out. She replied, "Got em, a mullet for sho, Pat." It was true,
she had netted several mullet, but what she didn't know was that she
had netted a snake as well!

159 Crabbing can be dangerous for those unfamiliar with "ocean
time." While one can bog for crabs when the tide goes out, one can net
123 a few when the tide starts back in. I learned that the trickling sounds
226 heard only at certain times are made when the nooks and crannies are
being filled with water. I also learned that the tide can be deceiving
• 133 because it comes in very slowly. Once we had been walking on the
muddy creek floor for hours when I casually observed that the water
was covering my shoes; a little later I noted that it was over my ankles.
I thought I was just walking into deeper puddles and thus continued to
practice my netting. Then I found that the water was beginning to hit
me above my knees. Suddenly I became alarmed and looked back
down the creek the way we had come. It was only then that I realized
that the water was not only filling the creek bed but had covered the
marshland, and there was no clearly perceivable way back to the
higher ground. Frightened, I yelled out to Miss Myma that we were
going to drown. She stopped, looked up and down the creek, pulled a
bit of Day's Work chewing tobacco out of her pocket, took a good bite,
offered me some, grinned when I passed on it, and finally said, "Guess
time we fe go now." She had crabbed in that creek since she was a
child, and she knew every bend and angle of it. Without her experi-
ence, however, I believe I would have panicked and perhaps drowned
because it takes only minutes for the tide to rush in and fill the creek at
any given point.

159 Miss Myma's presence was imperative at storytelling contests,
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3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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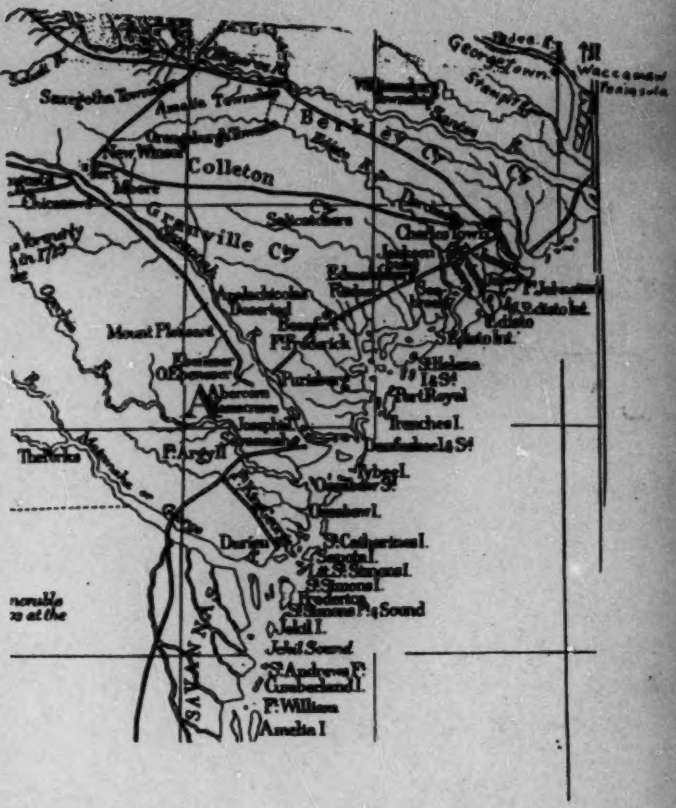

Map of the Sea Island Region. (From the South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine, vol. 27, no. 4 [October 1926], 189.)

[p. 16]

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

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Gullahs and the Carolina Lowcountry. (Personal Collection.)

[p. 327]

[p. 328 is blank]

41 Carawan & Carawan B,Ż-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders MM23
South Carolina
Johns Island

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

114 Star Hall to travel to other parts of the country to
123 share their songs, in an effort to keep alive some of the older folk material. Each of these projects brought a complex mixture of success and problems and a renewed determination to keep trying.

131 For generations the Johns Island people were
•133 relatively isolated from mainstream America. The low, flat island, covered with tidal creeks and
[505] marshes, farmland, and forests of oaks draped with
[491] gray Spanish moss, was accessible only by boat until the early part of the century, when bridges and causeways connecting it with the mainland began to be built. Cut off from the mainland, these de-
177 scendants of cotton plantation slaves retained many
178 aspects of the old slave culture: a regional dialect, Gullah, still marked by distinctly African and Caribbean traits; a large body of folktales, cures, and supernatural beliefs; and a folk version of Christianity with a "shouting" style of singing old spirituals and hymns and a local "praise house" form of worship.

344 Old and new institutions existed side by side. For many people, Moving Star Hall—a tiny, battered clapboard building—had been the central meeting place for nearly fifty years. It housed a "tend-the-sick" and burial society, a secret lodge,
[796] and a community of worship. Here the members could express themselves freely and fully; in the Sunday night worship service each person took a turn preaching, testifying, praying, and raising a song.

177 Down the road a mile or so is Wesley Meth-
794 odist Church, where a number of these same peo-
346 ple attended regular Sunday services. Here the old folk ways were gradually being replaced by more formal modern practices. Wesley is a fine church with handsome pews, Methodist hymnals, a robed
796 choir, and an organ. On the first Sunday of the
533 month everyone listened to the Reverend G. C. Brown, who came from the mainland in the 1930s with a college degree, and sang hymns and spirituals led by the choir. But on the three Sundays a month when he preached in other churches, the congregation forgot about the organ and the hymnals and sang older spirituals, hymns, and shouts,

(P XII-A)

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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[491]

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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[p. xiii]

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mr. Abraham Jenkins

PEOPLE DON'T SEE THAT "BIG SANTA CLAUS" THEY ONCE THOUGHT OF

179 464 People saw what happened when all that money came in with Kiawah and yet no one that I know got in any of those administrative positions out there. You find a few people got into the more menial jobs. Ninety percent of the jobs are in the lowest level, and then maybe five to ten percent are in a higher bracket, but not up in the really well-paid bracket. So people don't see that "big Santa Claus" they once thought of.

Mr. William Saunders

THEY WERE NEVER CONCERNED ABOUT THE PEOPLE THAT LIVE ON THOSE ISLANDS

185 I get pretty upset about things. There was a million dollars spent on turtles on Kiawah, because these people were concerned about the turtles. But they were never concerned about the people that live on those islands.

177 491 Still, as long as I can get some help from those people, then I don't have any problem with their lives. The moment all those rich people begin staying on Kiawah and Seabrook, they begin to improve the roads. Although it was built for them, I use it. It's accessible to everyone. And the people on Kiawah and Seabrook are pretty much conservationists, so they back most anything leaving things the way they are. [198]

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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41 Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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5: Nichols I-5 (no date) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Georgetown

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St Nichols I-5 (no date) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Georgetown

(CP-143-B)

MAP OF
GEORGETOWN COUNTY
(South Carolina Highway Department Map 10-71)

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6: Smith I,Y-5 (no date) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

CHAPTER I

AN ECOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF CONTEMPORARY SEA ISLAND SOCIETY

LOCATION OF THE ISLANDS

131 The five Sea Islands stretch along the Atlantic Sea Coast, south of the city of Charleston, South Carolina. The [491] Ashley River Bridge completed in 1922 connects the nearest sea island, James, to the southern tip of the city of Charleston. James Island is about two miles from Charleston.

131 The Wappo (Stono) River separates James from Johns •133 Island by way of the Maybank Highway; Johns is five miles from Charleston. The Wadmalaw Creek separates Johns from Wadmalaw Island. Wadmalaw's eastern body gulfs around the south easterly tip of Johns Island. On the north westerly side, the Wadmalaw Sound separates Wadmalaw and Yonges Islands. Yonges Island (also known as St. Pauls Island) is neighbored on its north westerly side by the communities of Hollywood, Ravenal and by Hegget to the northeast. Many native islanders ignore the distinction and consider these communities as part of the large island.

Edisto the most distant island is forty-two miles from Charleston. The Edisto beach area located on the southern tip of the island sits in the Atlantic Ocean. Edisto is the largest of the Sea Islands.

7: Jackson L-5 (1973-1976) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

CHAPTER 1

101 The field research on which this dissertation is based resulted from three years of study beginning in July 1973 and continuing through August 1976. In an effort to re-
101 121 strict variational data, the field work was conducted primarily on Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, because it is located further off shore and is less urbanized than many of the other Sea Islands. Linguistic research was also conducted on Johns, Edisto, Yongs and James Islands since
197 184 I was informed by the inhabitants that the language varied from one island to the next. Bennett gives an account of noticeable interisland variation in the early twentieth century:

> There are, especially among the islands, plantations so remote... as once to have developed dialects within the dialect, the characteristic speech and peculiar idioms of one plantation differing so from those of another as to make it very possible for the adept to determine by a negro's peculiarity of dialect what community, sometimes what island...was the spokesman's place. (Bennett 1908:336)

Considering the multilingual history and the geographical inaccessibility of these islands, variation is by no means impossible, though the extent is yet unmeasured.

133 The Sea Islands are separated from the Atlantic coast and other islands by tidal channels and dense marshland. Before the completion of the bridges connecting several of
505 491 them to the coast in the 1940's, inter-island communication was limited to a boat which traveled around the islands

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

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3. Map Showing the Sea Islands

[p. xxxii]

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

A Section of Beaufort District from Mills, Atlas of South Carolina (1825)

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

havens of the worlde" where "without danger all the shippes in the worlde myght be harbored."[1]

The coastal region of which St. Helena Island forms a part is, as Ribaut described it, "a country full of havens, rivers and islandes." Deep tidal rivers cut and divide the land into numerous islands of varying sizes, and the islands themselves are interlaced by broad tidal creeks. These facts recommended the region to the Spanish, French, and English as an ideal place for settlement, for as Robert Sandford, "Secretary and Chief Register for the Lords Proprietors of their County of Clarendon" in Carolina, said in 1666:

> the whole Country is nothing else but severall Islands made by the various intervenings of Rivers and Creeks, yett are they firme good Lands (excepting what is Marsh) nor of soe smale a seize, but to continne many of them thousands of acres of rich habitable wood land, whose very bankes are washed by River or Creek, which besides the fertility adde such a comodiousnesse for portage as few Countryes are equally happy in.[2]

These geographic conditions have also made for the isolation of the region. The soil is a light sand which makes road building difficult. The numerous marshes have to be crossed by causeways and the rivers by long bridges. It requires, therefore, a considerable outlay of capital to provide modern transportation facilities for the Sea Islands. As a result, most of them are still without bridges and good roads; they have been left to develop as they might. Today, in going to St. Helena Island, one must cross three rivers and two islands before one at last

[1] Jeannette T. Connor (ed.), *Jean Ribaut, The Whole & True Discouerye of Terra Florida*, pp. 90-91.

[2] A. S. Salley, Jr. (ed.), *Narratives of Early Carolina*, p. 101.

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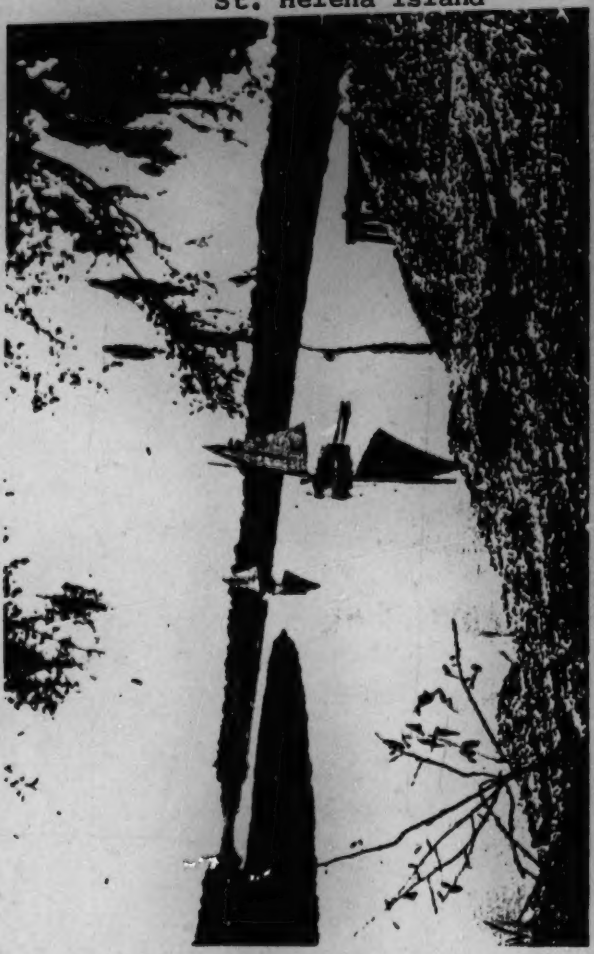

A TIDAL CREEK ON ST. HELENA ISLAND

[facing p. 24]

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248 132 133 The southern sea coast is subject to autumnal storms which occasionally destroy the planters' entire crop. Sir Charles Lyell, in his second visit to the United States in 1841 and 1842, commented upon this fact, mentioning that in 1756 the entire coast from St. Simon's Island, Georgia, as far north as Charles Town (Charleston) was overflowed, the sea rising six feet above its ordinary level.[44] Parts of the Sea Islands were under water in 1804 and 1824. In the latter year the crops were unusually promising. John Couper had matured a crop of some six hundred bales worth $90,000, but he lost most of the crop in twelve hours by the hurricane of September 14.[45] The next year his crop was nearly destroyed by caterpillars. On September 8, 1854, the coast was again visited by a destructive hurricane,[46] and since the ante-bellum period by two, one in 1893 and one in 1911, which have caused great suffering and loss of life.

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THE PLANTER AND HIS FACTOR

The very uncertainty of the crop, as well as the nature of it, tied the planter to the system of factorage so well known in England and other countries long before the settlement of the American colonies. Commission merchants in Charleston and Savannah readily credited sea-island cotton planters who might in one year make enough to pay off the debts of several years accumulation. It was customary, therefore, for the planter to spend his money before

[44] Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, I, 253.

[45] Couper-Wylly Letters. May 24, 1828, John Couper to his brother James Couper.

[46] U. B. Phillips, *Documentary History of American Industrial Society, Plantation and Frontier*, I, 141.

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of all those who knew the South, that the colored people of the Sea Islands, are the lowest grade of Negroes in America. I'm sure I hope I shall never see a worse set than those who live on our part of St. Helena Island."[113] Miss Harriet Ware, who had been conducting a school on St. Helena, concluded in 1863 that "as a general thing the Edisto people are a better class of blacks, more intelligent and cultivated, so to speak."[114]

It is not surprising that the St. Helena slaves should have been less advanced than those even of neighboring islands, for as it has already been pointed out, St. Helena Island was one of the most isolated of the Sea Islands. It is a buffer from the Atlantic for two other large islands, and the Island itself is cut up into various small islands by the broad tidal creeks which interlace it. It is likely that at least half of the more than two thousand slaves who inhabited St. Helena in 1860 had never been off the Island, for Beaufort was difficult to reach and only the most privileged were allowed to go there. Shut off from contact with the outside world, they were thus unfamiliar with many of the cultural traits of the whites which had sprung up since their own forebears had become "tamed."

It is remarkable, then, that the slaves should have achieved as much of the culture of the whites as they did. They were quick to learn from the few whites with whom they were thrown and from the house servants who went back and forth with the master's family from the Island

[113] Arthur Sumner Papers. Dec., 26, 1862.

[114] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 150. See also the opinion of Charles P. Ware, *ibid.*, p. 97; of W. C. Gannett, *ibid.*, p. 178; and see James S. Pike, *The Prostrate State: South Carolina Under Negro Government*, ch. XXXII; Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Southern Tour*, p. 94; Hazard Stevens, *The Life of Isaac Ingalls Stevens*, II, 354.